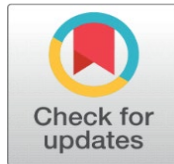
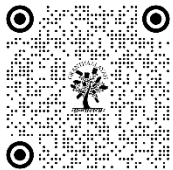


# AN APPROACH TO THE ARCHITECTONICAL METHOD THROUGH THE ANALYSIS OF THE DUTCH EMBASSY IN BERLIN BY KOOLHAAS & OMA

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## ABSTRACT

This article ventures into the investigation about method in architecture, that is, about the way in which we think and create architecture. In order to achieve such an objective, the article simply re-thinks a specific architecture that already exists, the Dutch Embassy in Berlin. In this way, architectural object and work are considered the susceptible elements that provide the material knowledge that unravels the manner and the methodology by which they were conceived.

A sensitive and intuitive itinerary through the graphic documents published about the embassy allows us to access a continuous narrative dissertation that deconstructs the conceptual issues that have constituted the building. Thus, this paper developed an object-based method, as opposed to traditional and orthodox text-based research. This does not preclude the inclusion of innumerable references related to the conceptual issues that we can find in this architectural analysis (Ungers, Vidler, Somol, etc., see citations and bibliography).

In this way, the paper differentiates itself from the scientific-historical research. Having it as a support, the paper opens a new way for future research which can be specifically focused on the architectural project's methodology.

At times, this research development can be disconcerting. This is because architectural method, our way of thinking and creating, is never analytically structured. Neither can a text that tries to unravel the creative method be strictly linear. For this reason, this text is an essay that tries to introduce us to the deepest motivations of a project, most of the time intertwined in the form of spiral paths, cyclical paths that unite and contradict each other at the same time. Therein lies the uniqueness of this study.

A second article <sup>1</sup> complements this analysis of the Embassy with an itinerary that, in this case, extends its route to other buildings by Koolhaas. This second paper also uses other comparisons with other historical references, for example, Venturi.

Both articles find in Koolhaas' method strategies based on a paradoxical conceptual identity, a diagrammatic coherence that coexists with the greatest semantic inconsistency. The impossible concordance between form, meaning and image. The scepticism towards the impossible unity, which, at the same time, pursues a challenging unitary iconic condensation.

**Keywords:** Design Method, Methodology, Dutch Embassy, Berlin, Rem Koolhaas, OMA



<sup>1</sup> The title of the second paper: "Iconographic condensation in the work by Rem Koolhaas, on the way from triple dissociation concept/meaning/image to the ambivalent in-significant meaning."

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Both papers are translated from the content of two epigraphs of the chapter about Koolhaas that belongs to the PhD thesis by the author: Besa (2015). *Arquitecto, obra y método. Análisis comparado de diferentes estrategias metodológicas singulares de la creación arquitectónica contemporánea*. Tesis Doctoral, ETSAM UPM. OAI: <http://oa.upm.es/38053/>

Published as a book in Spanish: Besa (2021). *Arquitecto, obra y método*: Kazuyo Sejima, Frank O. Gehry, Álvaro Siza, Rem Koolhaas, Peter Zumthor. *Diseño Editorial*.

The index and the conclusion of the PhD thesis of the author are published in English in: Besa (2017). *Architect, work, and method*. IDA: Advanced Doctoral Research in Architecture. p 1157-1179

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS

This paper focuses specifically on the analysis of one singular work by Koolhaas, the Dutch Embassy in Berlin. Thus, beyond Koolhaas' controversial writings and polemical statements aiming at the generic, this analysis resolves categorically to focus on the specificity of one particular architectonic work to end up with the methodological conclusions that come out from it. [Figure 1](#), [Figure 2](#)

**Figure 1**



**Figure 1** The Dutch Embassy in Berlin

**Source** <http://duitsland.nlambassade.org/organization/de-ambassade/het-ambassadegebouw>

**Figure 2**



**Figure 2** The Dutch Embassy and its Context

**Source** <http://duitsland.nlambassade.org/organization/de-ambassade/het-ambassadegebouw>

This choice of the Dutch Embassy is not just based on Koolhaas' architectonic beginnings in Berlin,<sup>2</sup> [Patteeuw \(2003\) Figure 3](#) nor only on the fact that this is one

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<sup>2</sup> "AMO is a child of the 1990s, but the true origin of AMO probably dates back to the legendary Koolhaas encounter with the Berlin Wall, in 1971." [Patteeuw \(2003\), 169](#)

of the less analysed of his recent buildings. Rather, the Embassy, behind its apparent anti-Koolhaasian compact severity, offers such dissociations and dysfunctions of its structural-significant condition, that its choice approaches one of the most genuine Koolhaasian manifestations. [Figure 4](#)

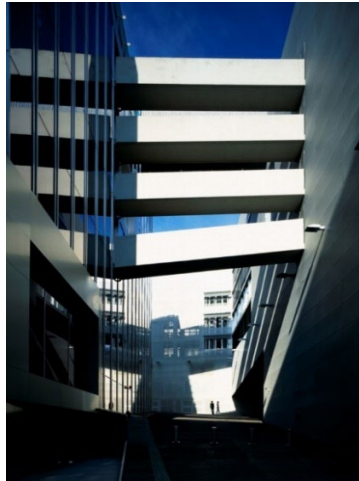
**Figure 3**



**Figure 3** The Berlin Wall in S, M, L, XL. Images used by Koolhaas to show his thoughts about the Wall.

**Source** KOOLHAAS, Rem. MAU, Bruce. OMA. S, M, L, XL. The Monacelli Press, New York 1995.

**Figure 4**



**Figure 4** The Dutch Embassy, Open Courtyard

**Source** <http://duitsland.nlambassade.org/organization/de-ambassade/het-ambassadegebouw>

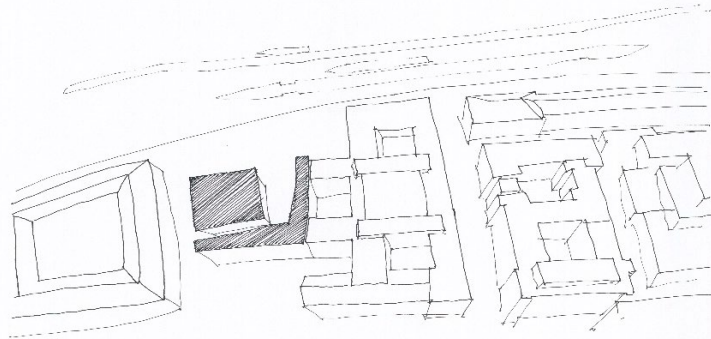
"OMA's place of origin is not New York, as one might assume, but Berlin. From there the path led to Manhattan, and thus, ahead the *Delirious New York* of 1978, a book through which Koolhaas became widely known, a less spectacular but similarly "delirious" Berlin is to be located. Like a red thread, this Berlin winds throughout the early projects and bears silent witness to the past of the Office of Metropolitan Architecture, whose history –how could it be otherwise in this city?- started directly at the Berlin Wall. The paradoxes and aporias in the sandy soil of the Mark Brandenburg represented a mode of perceiving reality that trained the eye well for the psychological terrain of the metropolis and its "delirium". In this place, the hunger for reality could find abundant, exotic nourishment and the desire for contradiction could discover sudden surfaces of friction to lay bare the secret poetic content of this reality". [Patteuw \(2003\), 165-166](#), the text is original from: Neumeyer, Fritz. (1990). "The Polemic Island in the City". In: assemblage. NR.11, Pp. 36-53.

In fact, parallel to the subversive contradictions of Koolhaas' work, the Embassy emerges from a paradoxical dilemma between the requirements of his client (the Netherlands) and its venue (Berlin).

“the client demanded a solitary building, integrating requirements of conventional civil service security with Dutch openness. Traditional (former West Berlin) city planning guidelines demanded the new building to complete the city block in 19th Century fashion.” [EL CROQUIS. \(1987-1998\), 414](#)

The conceptual idea of the building comes out of the conflictive synthesis between the obedience towards urban-planning rules and the self-assertion which constitutes the modern autonomous volume. [Figure 5](#)

**Figure 5**



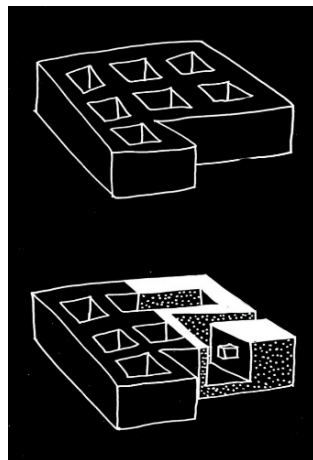
**Figure 5** Aerial Picture of the Embassy and its Context

Source Drawing by the Author

“We can further explore a combination of obedience (fulfilling the block's perimeter) and disobedience (building a solitary cube).” [EL CROQUIS. \(1987-1998\), 414](#)

This synthesis is directly translated into a conceptual drawing or sketch that comes to describe an intervention based on an autonomous building, a cube, supported by a podium that defines and completes the perimeter of the block where it is located. [Figure 6](#)

**Figure 6**



**Figure 6** Conceptual Scheme

Source OMA

“Our proposal (...), a freestanding cube on a –block completing- podium.”  
 EL CROQUIS. (1987-1998), 414

Therefore, the whole intervention is based on the dialectical relationship between two complementary/contradictory elements. On one hand, the podium plus the irregular volume which both belong to the same mass that fulfils the block. On the other hand, the free-standing volume or cube that stands on top of the podium. This is the dialectic between supporting and supported, which in turn extends into a formal/informal dialectic, since the regularity of the cube of the offices is contrasted by the irregularity of the volumes on which it stands. [Figure 7](#)

**Figure 7**



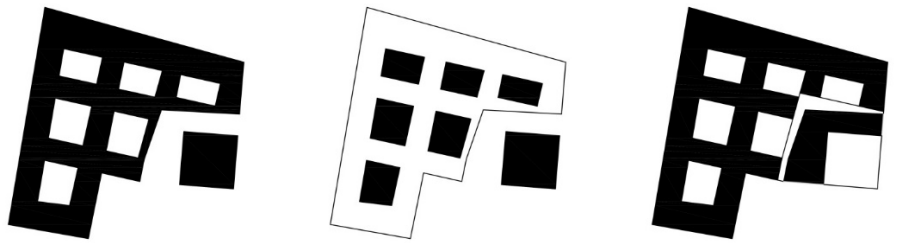
**Figure 7** The Dutch Embassy. Open Courtyard

**Source** Author

The informality of the “supportive” element is strengthened by its construction in aluminium perforated sheet, which gives it the necessary neutrality to become the background of the main building. On the contrary, the façade of the “cube”, main volume, is a curtain wall façade which distinguishes it from its metallic background. While this curtain wall façade prolongs the neutral austerity of the metallic irregular shape, it establishes a complementary dialectic and mutual reference between both elements. This analogy is reflected in the sketch, where the front cube suggests a kind of continuity due to the dotted perforations that represent the aluminium sheet behind, even though there is no correspondence with the materials that eventually built the Embassy. [Figure 6](#)

Indeed, the main block acquires different connotations beyond the robustness of its volume. Defined as an autonomous block, it can be understood in continuity with its own basement. Distinguished from the rest of the building, at the same time it prolongs the height of the block from which it is segregated. Being an independent entity, the surface of its roof is represented in analogy to the volume that fulfils the block. However, the main ambiguity of this cube is its own form and constitution since it has the same shape of the void of the courtyards of the block where it is located despite being a solid volume. [Figure 8](#)

**Figure 8**



**Figure 8 A:** Void/Solid.  
Source Author

**B:** First Void/Solid Inversion

**C:** Second Void/Solid Inversion

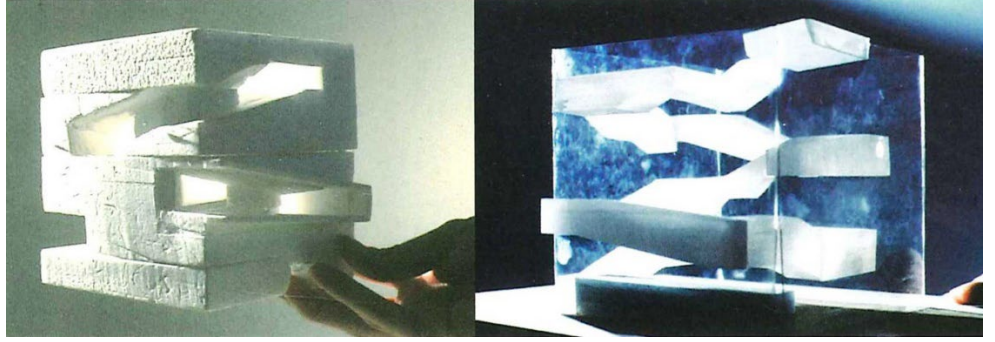
Thus, this synthesis between obedience/disobedience leads Koolhaas to reverse the solid/void dialectic, since the voids of the cubic yards of the block are transformed into a built volume, also cubic. Conversely, the irregular volume which embraces the patios in the traditional block is turned into the 'irregular' courtyard that surrounds the main volume of the building. In other words, Koolhaas turns around the traditional scheme, transforming void into solid and mass into space. Shifting hollowness into density, and its inverse, construction into a gap between two buildings.

**Figure 9**



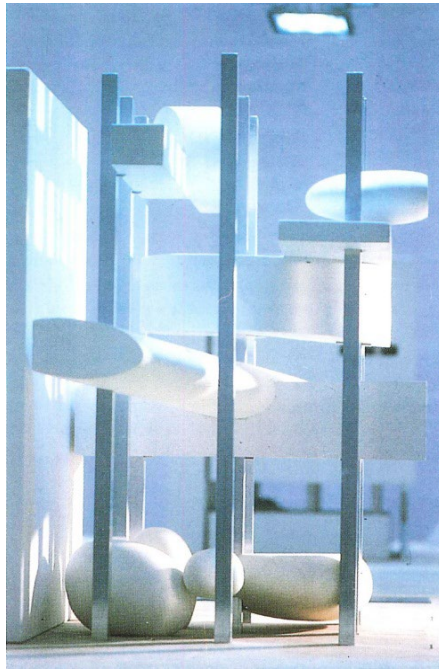
**Figure 9** Working Model  
Source OMA

This solid/void dialectic that constitutes the exterior volume is also extended into its interior, as the public outward space extends inward along a corridor throughout the volume of the cube that guides the visitor to the top floor of the building. [Figure 9](#) This drilling finds an ambivalent representation in the models that Koolhaas presents, since it is alternatively defined either as emptiness (dug hole) or as fullness (massive volumes within an interior empty space). This once again leads us to understand the conceptual void/solid inversion as one of the main themes that underlies the building. [Figure 10](#)

**Figure 10**

**Figure 10** The Same Promenade Represented Alternatively as a Void or as a Solid  
**Source** OMA

This kind of representation has a clear precedent in the models of the Library of Paris, where the hollow elements, empty forms, have become the most representative elements of the building. [Figure 11](#) As such, the elements created by the emptiness are the ones that acquire the most iconographic significance. In short, this is a mechanism that models the shape by its negative piercing instead of by the traditional positive constructive displacement. There are also other manifestations of this procedure in Koolhaas' work: Agadir Convention Centre, Utopolis Project in Almere, A Casa da Música in Porto and its predecessor Y2K House, Ascot Residence, Torre Bicenteneraio in Mexico City, etc. [Figure 12](#)

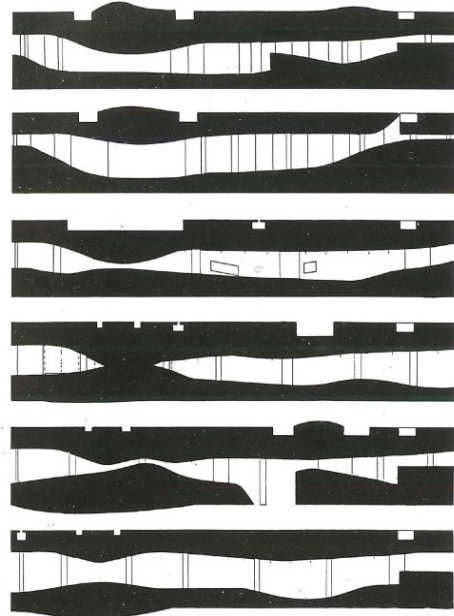
**Figure 11**

**Figure 11** Paris Library Model  
**Source** OMA

There are also many historical references of this solid/void inverted representation, some of which can even be found in relation with Koolhaas' academic life, particularly in Cornell University where Koolhaas met Rowe and

Ungers<sup>3</sup> [Koolhaas \(2006\)](#). Nevertheless, these two references of drawing and modeling, Rowe/Ungers, are beyond a mere technique of representation as they personify the two sides of the same figure/ground gestaltic inversion.

**Figure 12**



**Figure 12** Agadir Convention Centre. Sections

**Source** KOOLHAAS, Rem. MAU, Bruce. OMA. S, M, L, XL. The Monacelli Press, New York 1995

Indeed, the Rowe/Ungers opposition represents two complementary understandings of the public space/private mass dialectic in traditional/modern cities. On one side, Rowe, and his preference for the typology of the traditional city, where –mainly regular- hollows were vacated from the irregular urban morphological tissue. On the other side, Ungers and his archipelagos, which belong to the reversed modern typology, in which the regular forms of buildings stand upon the generic extension of Cartesian space. [Figure 13](#) and [Figure 14](#)

“Rowe posed the problem characteristically as a juxtaposition. If ‘regular’ freestanding buildings tended to create ill-defined, amorphous exterior space, he concluded that conversely, if one wished to make ‘regular’ well-defined spaces, then irregular buildings would be required.”<sup>4</sup> [Caragonne \(1994\)](#), 349.

<sup>3</sup> “In 1972 I won a fellowship that enabled me to study in the States. Before deciding, I checked out Ithaca, met first Colin Rowe then Ungers... With the first I listened to an exciting monologue, with the second I was involved, from the first second, in an exciting dialogue that resumed as if there was no real interruption every time, I met him since.” [Koolhaas \(2006\)](#).

This academic reference that leads us -not only to Ungers but even- to Rowe, is unavoidable because of its relationship with the differences of modern/traditional conceptions of the city that are struggling within the concept of the Embassy.

Both figures, Rowe/Ungers, are mentioned in this work about Koolhaas beyond the latent preference of Koolhaas for Ungers and beyond the conflictive –productive?- relationship between Ungers and Rowe. This latter controversial relationship has been reflected in the exhibition: [Suh \(2010\)](#). *Rowe x Ungers: Untold Collaborations on the City during the 1960-70s at Cornell*. [Exposition] August 25, 2010 – August 27 John Hartell Gallery, Sibley Dome Cornell, USA.

Before the time in Cornell, both, Rowe in Texas, and Ungers in Germany, had utilized this figure/ground inversion to represent their projects: “Exercise: scale model in which volumes of space are represented as volumes of mass.” [Caragonne \(1994\)](#), 397

“Ungers defined his Neue Stadt Project as the archetype for a city of “negatives and positives”-that is, a city in which the experience of form as a composition of built and void space became the main architectural motif” [Aureli \(2001\)](#), 182-184

Lara Schrijver also analyses the influence and resonance of OMU(Ungers) in OMA’s and Koolhaas’ work. [Schrijver \(2008\)](#), 235-261

<sup>4</sup> [Caragonne \(1994\)](#), 349. More references: “by the early 1970s, the model between (...) two apparently conflicting requirements was firmly established. As Schwartz and Fong put it, the hotel “could satisfy the disparate requirements of the public and private realms”; that is, it could accommodate often complex programmatic requirements while maintaining the urban fabric.” [Caragonne \(1994\)](#), 349.



Figure 13

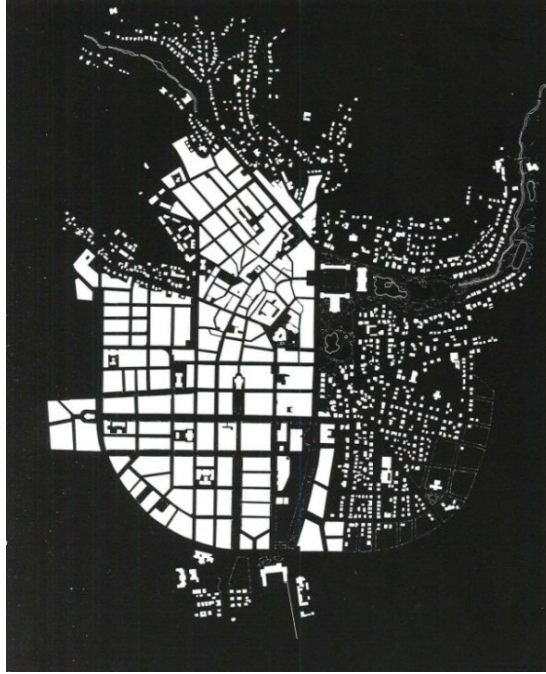


Figure 13 Image on the Cover of Collage City  
Source ROWE, Collin. KOETTER, Fred. Collage City

Figure 14

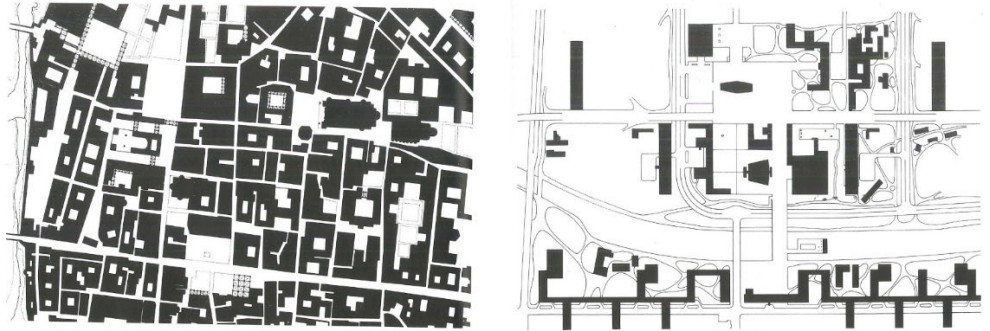


Figure 14 A Comparative Between Traditional/Modern Cities in Collage City  
Source ROWE, Collin. KOETTER, Fred. Collage City

Then it is obvious how this solid/void representation refers to the two opposite **regular/irregular** typologies that are interwoven in the Embassy.<sup>5</sup> For these architects, the representation of the negative **black/white** shape not only refers to

<sup>5</sup>In *Lotus International*, David Blakeslee Middleton [Cornell \(1979\)](#), one of Rowe's students, describe the philosophy guiding that studio through the 1970s: "There are at present two major urbanistic conceptions: The traditional city –a solid mass of building with spaces carved out of it; and the city in a park –an open meadow within which isolated buildings are place... The potential of combining the positive aspects of both the traditional and modern city has been the primary motivation underlying (the studio) projects." [Caragonne \(1994\)](#).

The same polarity is described in [Schumacher \(1971\)](#), 78-86

These two complementary understandings of the city were tested in Berlin by the two political extremes: traditional city was tested in Stalinallee project in East Berlin, modern city in Hansa Viertel in West Berlin. Ungers proposed a third alternative through his Green Archipelago, which, according to Pier Vittorio Aureli, influenced the autonomous Super-blocks that Koolhaas developed in his first projects. Indeed, some of these islands were located on podiums that highlighted his proposal's autonomy, similarly to the case of the Embassy.

These projects by Koolhaas and Ungers are not looking for the synthesis of the above-mentioned cities, but rather they belong to the autonomy of the modern solution. Because, far from seeking a continuity of the traditional city, basically they come to criticize the restoration of the historical perimeters that Krier brothers proposed. [Aureli \(2001\)](#), 178 They also distance themselves from the morphological mass proposed by Rowe. [Aureli \(2001\)](#), 206

<sup>5</sup> These typologies are also related to the two opposite notions, defined as inclusivism and exclusivism, that Stuart Cohen tries to overcome in his critical dissertation on Physical Contextualism [Cohen \(1998\)](#).

the **solid/void** dialectic but also to **modern/traditional** conceptions of the city, as well as to the differences between **public/private** space, and to **interior/exterior** polarity in relation to the limit of built shape.

Precisely, this limit between interior/exterior is responsible for the strong determinative character that is defined in black/white representations by Rowe and Ungers. In the case of Koolhaas nevertheless, this limit loses its consistency, and it is no longer a mere exclusive juxtaposition thanks to the promenade that inserts itself from the exterior, breaking down the boundaries of the original volumes. As the limit of the building has been destroyed, 'burst' by a promenade as if it were a dermatological parasite that gets under the skin, it leaves visible marks of the scars through its way. [Figure 15](#).

**Figure 15**

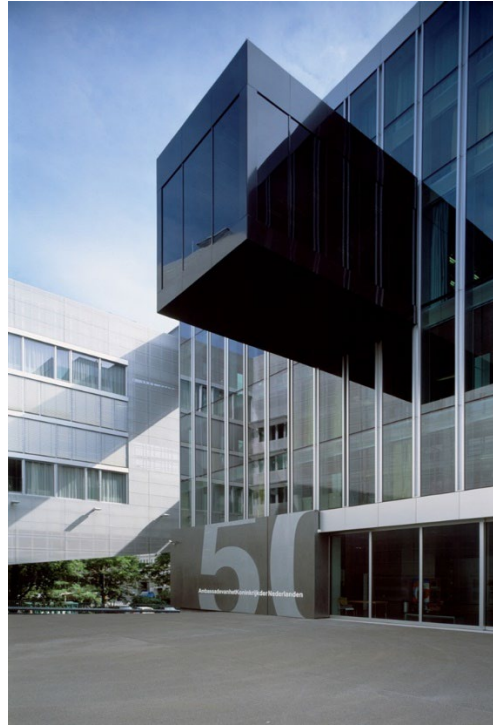


**Figure 15** The Promenade's Scars on the Façade

Source <http://duitsland.nlambassade.org/organization/de-ambassade/het-ambassadegebouw>

However, in this case, such scars are not always prominent because they are shown alternatively as introducing indentations into the surface of the building or as volumes that exceed the limit of the façade, i.e., as voids into the solid or solids over the solid. Thus, Koolhaas breaks the strong solid/void duality by which Rowe's sketches were defined.

And so, once the consistency of the interior/exterior duality is weakened, Koolhaas reverses that relationship with a new turn of the screw. In this case, by a positive volume that inserts itself into its negative inverse void, which is the box that cantilevers from the main building into the courtyard of the Embassy. This volume hosts a key element of the program, the ambassador's reception room, which is stripped of its intimacy and pushed out to be defiantly exposed to the gazes from the exterior. [Figure 6](#) and [Figure 16](#).

**Figure 16****Figure 16** The Ambassador's Reception Room

Source <http://Duitsland.Nlambassade.Org/Organization/De-Ambassade/Het-Ambassadegebouw>

Thus, similarly to the way in which the void was introduced into the solid, this solid is now the element which is inserted into the void. But this cantilevered volume is not only an independent element but rather it can have its origins in the promenade itself. As if the promenade, drilling the building, had pushed its entrails out, forcing the most intimate room to leave the centre that would correspond to a traditional humanist interpretation.

“The centre relies on what is supposed to be built around it. Alternatively, the centre is always ‘foreign’. It is something brought in from outside, by definition without justification, to found something new and different to what was there before.” Coyne (2011), 24

“The centre depends on the periphery” Coyne (2011), 33

Beyond these speculations that interpret this volume expelled by the promenade, beyond whether this was the case or not, it is obvious that both, the ‘spat out’ volume and the terrifying drill of the promenade, respond to the same will: the interest to uncover all the intimacy and interiority that architecture has represented so far.

On the contrary, other interpretations in some publications about OMA’s work refer to the austere exterior of the Embassy and comprehend the interior as a surprising space which is hidden from the exterior of the building. In contrast, one could also understand the Embassy’s interior directly exposed through the drilling operations that have been made upon it. Thus, the interior would be stripped out rather than secretly kept. Indeed, although the building shows the restrained appearance of its façade, it also makes evident the scarring operations of the

promenade over it. It is the paradox by which an apparent severity attenuates its expression of a terrible denuding operation<sup>6</sup> Koolhaas (2006).

Beyond the conceptual and dialectic coherence of all the operations performed over the Platonic solid, their result and their connotation provide the building with a radical and subversive tinge. And so, the coherence of all the dialectics described so far, **interior/exterior**, **obedience/disobedience**, **solid/void**, and so on, coexists with the subversion that is the result of the application of that conceptual coherence to its most extreme consequences, since, as we have seen, the analysis of solid/void dialectic has led us to comprehend the subversive interior/exterior relationship in this building.

This is the conflictive relationship between interior and exterior of buildings that Koolhaas explicitly refers to in his *Conversations with Students* Koolhaas (1996). With his words in those conversations, Koolhaas points out certain operating forces that work in the socio-cultural contexts which come to transcend traditional procedures that have generated architectonic form so far:

“The first observation is that, in a building beyond a certain size, the scale becomes so enormous and the distance between center and perimeter, or core and skin, becomes so vast that the exterior can no longer hope to make any precise disclosure about the interior. In other words, the humanist relationship between exterior and interior, based upon an expectation that the exterior will make certain disclosures and revelations about the interior, is broken. The two become completely autonomous, separate projects, to be pursued independently, with no apparent connection.” Koolhaas (1996), 15

In some new commercial architectonic manifestations Koolhaas perceives such vastness of their scale and size that the centre of the building reaches a dissociation from its limit, forcing us to reconsider the correlative relationship that the interior and exterior had in traditional humanistic discipline. Since the exterior is no longer able to articulate and respond to its volumetric immensity, the skin of the building can be totally independent from its inner content and can even receive other assignable content. Thus, according to our time, the skin can be a matter of plastic surgery to model the external image of the body releasing it from its most intimate entity. This operation can even be extended to question the identity of a person, and even its gender, an extreme that Pedro Almodóvar shows in his film *The Skin I Live In*.<sup>7</sup>

The case of the Embassy does not present properly a skin, neither is the building large enough to correspond to this theory by Koolhaas which comes from the proclamations concerning the vast *Bigness*<sup>8</sup> Koolhaas (1995). However, the intentions behind his theories have found their own course in the building of the Embassy, not because the interior is denied by a skin that hides it –or detaches from it-, but rather because the exterior invades it. Indeed, the promenade that is introduced from the exterior towards the interior of the building implies a traumatic operation that invalidates any attempt to recover the intrinsic consistency of the pure volume of classical architecture.

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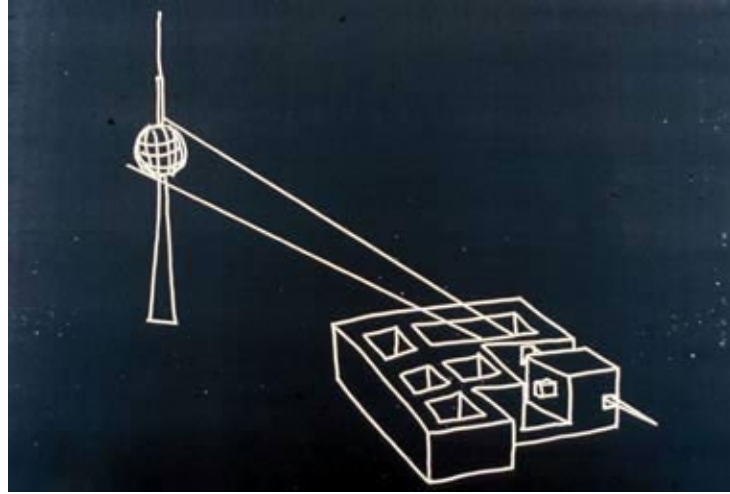
<sup>6</sup> These analyses also understand the interior dissociated from the exterior while this paper understands the interior as a direct consequence of the operations that have been made from the exterior of the building. “There is little coordination between interior and exterior. In the contrast between the internal vitality of this organism and the tranquil expression of its facades, there is something intriguing. Koolhaas’ miniature “diplomatic” village an Expressionist labyrinth with a surprisingly informal interior realm can be compared to the reserved air of a gentleman, who though excited never allows it to show (a diplomat for example).” Koolhaas (2006).

<sup>7</sup> Almodóvar, P. (Director). (2010). *La piel que habito* [Film]. El deseo. <http://www.lapielquehabito.com/>

<sup>8</sup> This Koolhaasian *Bigness* term is used because similar arguments, related to the skin and the size that are developed in the text of *Conversation with Students*, are also collected by Koolhaas himself in a text with the name: “Bigness or the problem of the large”. Koolhaas (1995).

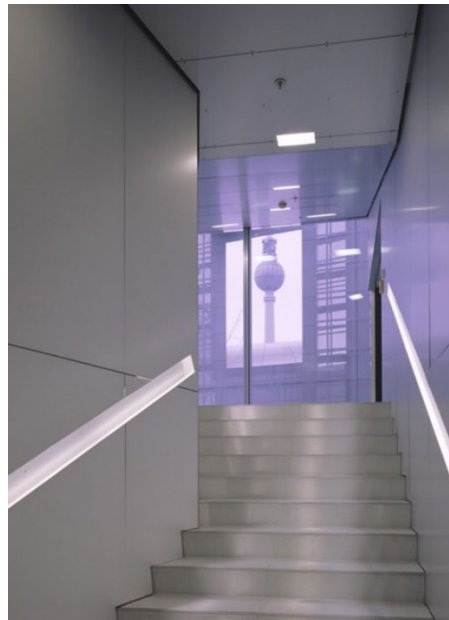
To the extent which it could be said that this is a building without interiority, since, it has been wholly formalized by the contingencies and parameters that are introduced from the exterior, as the entire building has been primarily designed outside-inwards. Even the promenade itself and other singular elements in this building are so externally modelled from the outside references to the point that it is literally skewered by the context. [Figure 17](#), [Figure 18](#).

**Figure 17**



**Figure 17** The Context of the Embassy Modelling the Promenade  
Source OMA

**Figure 18**



**Figure 18** Views Along the Promenade  
Source <http://duitsland.nlambassade.org/organization/de-ambassade/het-ambassadegebouw>

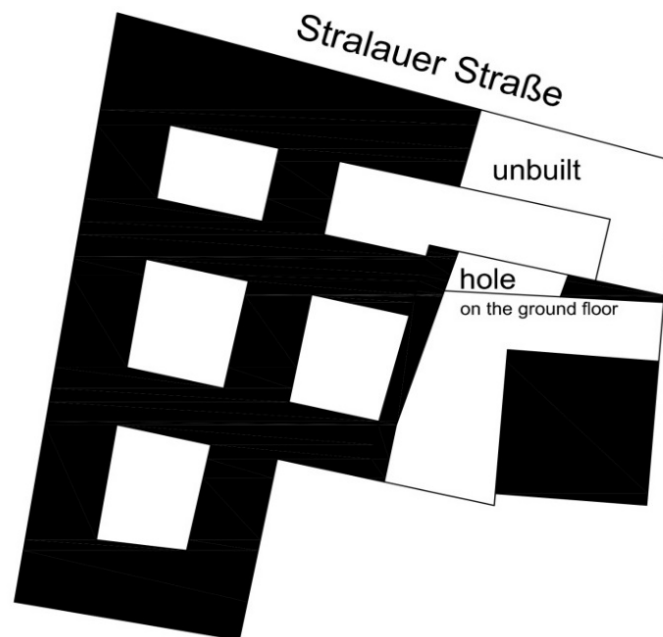
“The trajectory exploits the relationship with the context, river Spree, Television Tower (‘Fernsehturm’), park and wall of embassy residences;

part of it is a 'diagonal void' through the building that allow one to see the TV tower from the park." [EL CROQUIS. \(1987-1998\), 415](#)

Due to these outside influences which have operated upon it, the Embassy becomes permeable to the exterior view, suggesting typical Dutch transparency by which dwellers show the intimacy of their homes through their 'naked' windows. It is not only a matter of exposition of intimacy but again a matter of inversion, since the building shows a permutation of privacy that also has its origins in Berlin itself.<sup>9</sup>

At this point the reader should have a comparative look at [Figure 5](#) and [Figure 6](#), also [Figure 19](#), to observe that the entire complex has not been completed yet. Another project, also designed by Koolhaas, (the headquarters of Anthroposophical Movement) continues the irregular volume of the embassy completing the entire urban block. That project has not been built yet. Consequently, one of the private patios of the block remains open to the street that is behind the Embassy, *Stralauer Straße*. Meanwhile, the public space of the embassy communicates through a large irregular hole with this open courtyard, allowing crossed views from both sides. [Figure 19](#)

**Figure 19**



**Figure 19** Built and Unbuilt in the Block

**Source** Author

In fact, walking down the *Stralauer Straße* at the back of the Embassy, we find ourselves looking at the courtyard of the Embassy through a hole, thinking that we are curiously meddling in a private area. Then we suddenly realise that we are not intruding into an intimacy from an exterior, but rather that we are looking through a hole in a party wall, from a private courtyard which is open because the block is not concluded yet. [Figure 20](#).

<sup>9</sup> More than once Koolhaas has showed his interest in this voyeuristic inversion through an allusion to a building he usually refers to, the Bentham's Panopticon. In its scheme, Koolhaas finds a reversal of the gazes by which the prisoners are the ones who end up watching the guard and not viceversa. This situation becomes classified as 'very Dutch' by Koolhaas in an interview by Olbrist in the Architecture Biennale [Olbrist \(2010\)](#).

Figure 20



**Figure 20** View of the Open Courtyard from Stralauer Straße

**Source** Author

Indeed, what we are observing through the hole is the public area of the building (public courtyard of the embassy). Meanwhile, the windows that are opened widely in the façade in front of us relate to the private part of the complex, as they are the windows of the private houses of the embassy that should look on to a private courtyard not yet closed. Because, these are the homes of some of the staff and the guard of the embassy, housed in the interstitial building that Koolhaas uses to adjust the embassy to the block as the background of the main building. These homes open their windows to the courtyard of the embassy and to the adjoining patio, which is right now open to the street, as the block has not been completed yet as is characteristic of Berlin. In the end, we feel like voyeurs, caught in the act, intrusive yet exposed. We have the sensation of meddling in an intimacy, while being naked due to the carnal nudity of the characteristic party walls of one of the heartbreaking gaps that still remains in the centre of Berlin.

Another one of the most disquieting episodes showing this ambiguous condition of intimacy is the moment in which the floor of the promenade is transformed into glass. [Figure 21](#) Our solid floor disappears just when the promenade is aligned parallel to a Nazi building, and we are accompanied by the repetitive gloomy rhythm of its windows. Thus, our support sinks beneath our feet precisely when we find ourselves in front of one of the most uncertain milestones of our recent past.

What is more, just in this precise moment when we lose our sense of safety and we wonder if the floor will withstand our presence, just when we discover that our own 'butt' is exposed to the gaze of anyone in the street, we find ourselves located right next to the working area of the embassy from which only a glass wall separates us. Thus, without intending to, we are intruding into a private area, observing it from a slightly elevated place, and therefore, from a superior position. Again, it is the same inverted voyeurism through which we find ourselves interfering with someone else's privacy while our own intimacy is more exposed than ever.

**Figure 21**



**Figure 21** The Promenade, when its Floor Becomes Glass

Source <http://duitsland.nlabassade.org/organization/de-ambassade/het-ambassadegebouw>

However, these connotations about the inversion of the intimacy that can be perceived in the building, are hidden under its austere image. Insurgent episodes like these are concealed under a coat of apparent neutrality, which makes their subversive allusions even more unusual, given the building's sober character and restrained expression.

In relation to this subversive transparent neutrality, materials assume a key role, since they are played out to show indiscriminately their constructive semantic ambiguity. Specifically, glass and aluminium perforated sheet show this double, contained yet subversive, condition. Since both are going to appear solid and consistent from certain perspectives, while permeable and indiscreet from other points of view and different lighting conditions. [Figure 22](#), [Figure 23](#)

This fact illustrates how the character of the building fulfils its institutional requirements and responds to its necessary diplomatic distance, whereas a closer analysis leads to the discovery of disturbances of conventional order and subversions of its institutional program. This also shows how this restrained image does not reflect the subversive content that it connotes.



Thus, this building shows a complete dissociation between its **image** and its **content**. But also, the Embassy's subversive **connotation** coexists with its most rigorous conceptual **order**, since, as this analysis has shown so far, this building's most extreme nudity coincides with –and comes out of– the conceptual scheme where all its paradoxical dialectics come together: interior/exterior, void/solid, formal/informal, continuous/discontinuous, public/private, obedience/disobedience, regular/irregular, modern/traditional, etc.

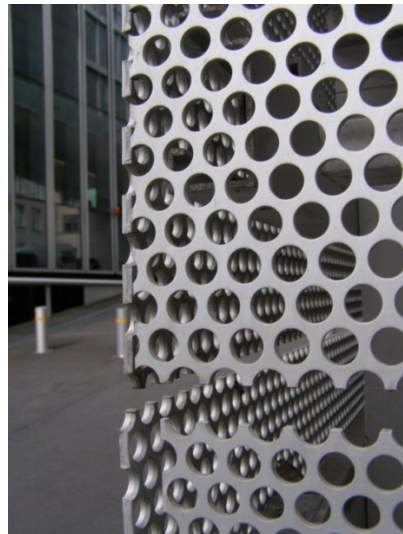
**Figure 22**



**Figure 22** Massiveness, Transparency and Reflections Making the Public/Private Inversion Stronger

Source Author

**Figure 23**



**Figure 23** Aluminium Shed

Source Author

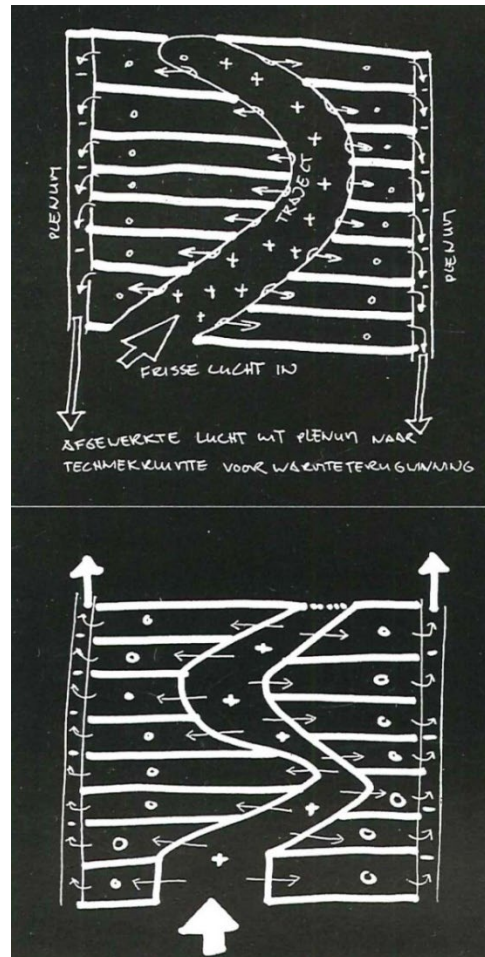
This means that beyond the double dissociation image/meaning, Koolhaas also dissociates **conceptual form** from its **subversive connotation**, which somehow illustrates that this building reaches a triple dissociation **conceptual-**

**form/meaning/image.** Surprisingly, this is the similar disjunction of constitutive elements of architecture which we can find in the words of Koolhaas about the context of the Embassy, specifically in his analysis of the Berlin Wall:

“It was clearly about communication, semantic maybe, but its meaning changed almost daily, sometimes by the hour. It was affected more by events and decisions thousands of miles away than by its physical manifestation. Its significance as a “wall” –as an object- was marginal; its impact was utterly independent of its **appearance**. (...) I would never again believe in form as the primary vessel of **meaning**.” Koolhaas (1995), 227

Nevertheless, even though Koolhaas gets us used to his provocative statements which aim at the illicit subversion of the traditional values of the architectonic discipline and their subsequent dissociation, at the same time and in this same project of the embassy, we can find Koolhaas’ unusual interest in a unique conceptual coherence. Such willingness becomes explicit in Koolhaas’ words describing the design of the air conditioning that runs along the promenade which is “slightly over pressurized”. *El Croquis* (2006), 415 This is designed so that the leading element of the building “works as a main air duct from which fresh air percolates to the offices to be drawn off via the double (plenum) façade”. (Ibid.) [Figure 24](#) As OMA’s description of the project continues:

**Figure 24**



**Figure 24** Air Conditioning Schemes

Source OMA

“This ventilation concept is part of a strategy to integrate more functions into one element. This integration strategy is also used with the structural concept.” (Ibid.)

This interest in one synthetic idea that leads the whole project could be reminiscent of a designing method by which architecture finds its own legitimacy and support in the conceptual identity through which it is thought. Synthesized in a sketch, in a formal scheme, one conceptual diagrammatic idea condenses all the dialectics that constitute the project (interior/exterior, void/solid, formal/informal, continuous/discontinuous...), in the same way that this diagrammatic idea is responsible for supporting all the decisions taken during the whole design process.

## 2. SOME HISTORICAL REFERENCES

The conclusion of the previous analysis of the Embassy shows a widely used method in the architecture teaching realm, since it provides the student with the necessary argumentative skill to account for all decisions of the project. And it provides the skill to synthesize in one inclusive scheme all the problems that converge on the exercise which he/she faces. However, beyond the scope of teaching, and also within it, the seeking of an idea that supports the architecture through its intrinsic concept may have its origins in the moment in which the legacy of the ancients began to lose its undisputed authority.

“in opposing the “Ancients”, one group held to the idea that a good work of art is a creation in accordance with an idea in the artist’s mind.” [Drew \(1979\), 101](#)

As the former ancients were questioned by the emergence of the autonomous illustrated subject, architecture could not find support in their legacy anymore. It became necessary to find its legitimacy in a concept, to be based on an idea.<sup>10</sup> [Madec \(1997\), 62](#)

“The first of the three steps in making a design consists in putting down on paper a rapid sketch which presents, in preliminary form, the essence of the idea in the mind of the designer. (...) called a *pensiero*, or thought (...).

The third and last step consisted in bringing these studies into a final synthesis, a final design, that was a visual culmination of the idea in his mind.” [Drew \(1979\), 114-115](#)

The aim was to find such consistency during the design process that the decisions, and the method itself, were directly identified with the conceptual idea of the architecture that was being projected:

”An idea, so to speak, is the cornerstone around which to build the design”  
“(...) in the development of the design process, Hoesli had stressed to his students the importance of gaining an overarching “idea” that would clearly illustrate and express an architectural response to the requirements of program, site, and structure. The emergence of that

<sup>10</sup> “en su cuestionamiento sistemático de la tradición, la actitud moderna rechaza la imitación de la naturaleza y descubre en la especulación intelectual el medio que da acceso al futuro.” [Madec \(1997\), 62](#)

Another quote that justifies the development of this analysis: “Why this change should have occurred in the middle of the eighteenth century is not entirely clear, but it is evident that as soon as architects became aware of architectural history, and of the architectures of exotic civilizations (and hence of architectural ‘styles’); as soon as they became uncertain as to which of a wide variety of tectonic elements they might appropriately use; they were obliged to make basic decisions involving moral judgements, and to discuss fundamental problems which their more fortunate forbears had disregarded because in their ignorance of history, and the security of their traditions, they did not know that these fundamental problems existed, and hence were blissfully unaware that there were any ethical decisions to make”. [Collins \(1965\), 41](#)

architectural idea as a basis for the development or “working out” of a student’s architectural exercise lay at a critical juncture in the design process –somewhere on the cusp between the pre-drawing, analytical phase and the first early sketches.”

“The idea of an architectural design is that spirit which is felt throughout the design, the spiritual part of the building... It is the thought in the designer’s mind that guides him in every decision and ultimately results in the continuity of the whole design...”<sup>11</sup> Caragonne (1994), 264

These previous quotes refer to the Texas Rangers era at The Texas School of Architecture, which has already been quoted and is also directly related with Rowe. They show that architecture was seeking so yearningly its identity as an idea that the design was even identified with the thought which constituted it. Thus, this unachievable quasi-spiritual synthesis made architecture reach a congruent ‘whole’ that tried to unify old existing metaphysical dissociations between matter and spirit, between form and idea.

Beyond the attractive suggestions of some of these statements, their aim could be even seen as idealist, a naive synthesis of the elements that were split up by the analytical philosophy. That is because the identity that an idea provides may not be enough to unite the elements that Kant had already differentiated trying to preserve the universality of the judgement of taste. Indeed, the ideal concept in which the Texas Rangers found a spiritual unity had already been dissociated by Kant, who tried to safeguard the sense of taste distinguishing it from the conceptual order of the object.<sup>12</sup>

“(...) perfection gains nothing by beauty or beauty by perfection; but, when we compare the representation by which an object is given to us with the Object (as regards what it ought to be) by means of a concept, we cannot avoid considering along with it the sensation in the subject. And thus when both states of mind are in harmony our whole faculty of representative power gains.” Kant (1914)

Extending his analytical method, Kant even distinguished the conceptual order of the object from its utilitarian application. And along the lines of the preservation of the common sense of beauty, Kant also differentiated aesthetic objectivity from the expression of the sublime.<sup>13</sup>

“We have now only to resolve the faculty of taste into its elements in order to unite them at last in the Idea of a common sense.” Kant (1914)

Within our disciplinary field, and through a theory that came to question the authority of Greek Orders Kaufmann (1952),<sup>14</sup> Perrault also made a distinction

<sup>11</sup> The quote continues trying to relate the conceptual idea with the impression that it triggers in our unconscious: “it must have the power to stimulate the human emotionally, if only subconsciously”. It is a quote from the words by Ken Boone, from the already quoted “Texas Rangers’ era at The Texas School of Architecture. Caragonne (1994), 264

Other quotes from the same page: “(...) one of the most fascinating aspects of the new teaching as it evolved in Austin: the mysterious universal, timeless essence of the architectural idea. (...)

“An idea, architecturally, is the scheme or motif behind a design. It is, if handled right, apparent in the creation itself and furnishes the reason for the design looking as it does. A good idea is readily discernible in a building, and one doesn’t have to ask why this or that was done in the construction of it because the reason is obvious in the design.”

<sup>12</sup> “There are two kinds of beauty: free beauty (*pulchritudo vaga*) or merely dependent beauty (*pulchritudo adhaerens*). The first presupposes no concept of what the object ought to be; the second does presuppose such a concept and the perfection of the object in accordance therewith. The first is called the (self-subsistent) beauty of this or that thing; the second, as dependent upon a concept (conditioned beauty), is ascribed to Objects which come under the concept of a particular purpose.” (...) “the one is speaking of free, the other of dependent, beauty, —that the first is making a pure, the second an applied, judgement of taste.” (§ 16.: KANT, 1914)

<sup>13</sup> “The Beautiful and the Sublime agree in this, that both please in themselves.” (...) “But there are also remarkable differences between the two.” (§ XXIII.: Kant, I. 1914)  
This is the same irreconcilable crack which is not far away from the drama that architects like Boullée confess having suffered in their own flesh and body. “Boullée was fully aware that he aimed at discrepant objectives. How could the elementary geometrical shapes be reconciled with picturesqueness? He lived in the illusion that he was able to reach the impossible, to reconcile the irreconcilable. This is the meaning of his confession at the end of his text: “I had to fear that in taking the way of picturesqueness. I might become theatrical. But I was anxious not to renounce that purity which architecture demands. I believe I have circumvented the risk of ambiguity.” Kaufmann (1952), 473

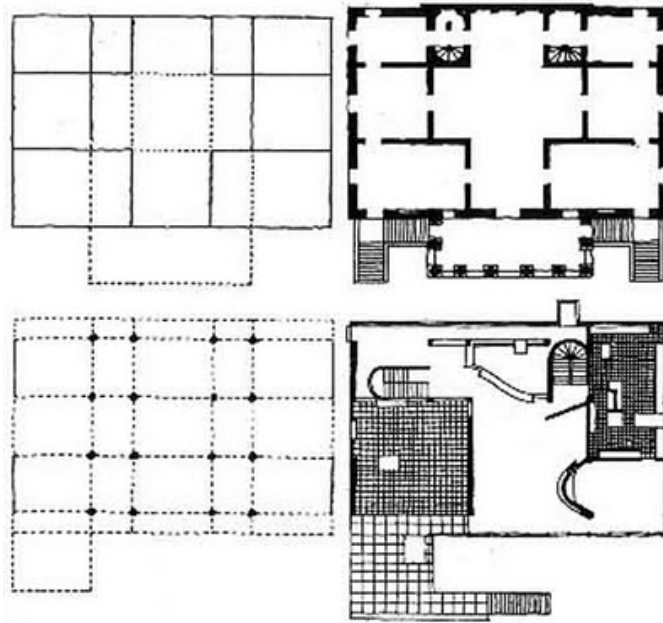
<sup>14</sup> Perrault’s demystifying of Greek Orders: “(...) Perrault (...) afirma (...) que los principios de analogía y de antropometría pueden, todo lo más, servir para distinguir los tres órdenes arquitectónicos, pero de ninguna manera explicar sus reglas de proporciones. Perrault desacraliza así el concepto de Natura, que sirve tradicionalmente de justificación a las “reglas del gusto” (...). Teyssot (1980), 22

between positive beauty (objective) and arbitrary beauty, orientating himself with this differentiation towards the objectivity of the first one [Herrmann \(1973\)](#).<sup>15</sup> That is because his differentiation, and Kantian analytic differentiation as well, by their simple enumeration of different parts of the aesthetic judgement, had already started leaning towards one of them. This is due to the fact that these analytical enumerations actually belong to the objectivity of one of their elements, i.e., their whole procedure is in fact part of the rational thinking implied in the conceptual positive beauty that they try to separate.

Thus, Kant was opening a path for Hegel, since the difficulty implied in the transcendentalism of the common sense of beauty eventually made architecture set its foundations within the pure conceptuality of what was thought. Therefore, due to architecture's unreachable aesthetic objectivity, it was required to base its legitimacy on the ideal of an abstract concept.

“This is the definitive moment, (...): the moment when things take a form. The architectural is basically, then, something that surpasses the concrete and necessarily belongs to the domain of the abstract.” [Mansilla \(2000\)](#), 98

**Figure 25**



**Figure 25** Rowe's Comparative between Palladio and Le Corbusier

**Source** ROWE, Colin. *The Mathematics of the Ideal Villa and Other Essays*. The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge y London, 1976

Therefore, if architecture can be reduced to an abstract concept beyond its specific embodiments, it can also be conceived through a conceptual scheme where all different dialectics find place, as is clear in the conceptual scheme of the

<sup>15</sup> “One must suppose,” he declares, “that there are two kinds of beauties in architecture, those that are founded on convincing reasons and those that depend on prejudice,” or as he also formulates it, “I oppose to a beauty which I call positive and convincing another which I call arbitrary.” Under positive beauties he lists ‘richness of material, the size and magnificence of the building, precision and neatness of execution, and symmetry’, while he calls arbitrary those beauties that ‘depend on one’s own volition to give things that could be different without being deformed a certain proportion, form and shape’. Those belonging to the first group are recognized and appreciated by everyone, since by their very nature they are well defined, to such an extent that any fault would immediately show. However, as far as the second group is concerned, the question still remains of how it is possible that things exist in architecture which ‘although they have in themselves no beauty that must without fail please’ are yet pleasing to the eye.” [Herrmann \(1973\)](#)

Embassy.<sup>16</sup> This is the idealism that was later extended to the structuralist tradition, in which architecture could eventually be reduced to a schematic structural diagram. The structural schemes by Wittkower<sup>17</sup> summarizing Palladian architecture could be placed within this context. And also, this is the same concept that led Rowe to compare Le Corbusier and Palladio beyond their formal and specific particularities.<sup>18</sup> [Figure 25](#)

Thus, in the aforementioned traditions,<sup>19</sup> i.e., in the idealism and in the scientific-structuralism traditions, the well balanced scale of the elements of Kantian judgment ended up leaning towards one of those elements. And so, architecture was oriented towards its structural-spatial foundation, due to its plastic and formal condition. This led architecture to be conceived through its conceptual/ideal schematic representation rather than through its literary or metaphorical connotations.

“For as the pictorial effect was devalued and the intellectual aspect of architecture, the spatial/structural idea, was lifted into prominence, there is in the work of this period a direct elemental quality; a conscious effort to employ only the most limited means in order to convey its ideas.” [Caragonne \(1994\), 258-259](#)

“Semantically, the architectural idea was nearly always expressed metaphorically, but in a visual rather than a literary sense.” [Caragonne \(1994\), 264](#)

Thus, emphasizing the objective condition of the conceptual idea, the support that architecture found in the consistency of its formal scheme shifted the interest from its meaning to its structure, opening the door to future dissociations between the architectonic conceptual frame and its semantic connotation.

In the following quote by Luis Moreno Mansilla, the reader can notice the preference of the ideas over the meaning and personal connotation of architecture: “In the process of formation, then, each thing takes its own path: the structure acquires a specific character, the floor plan begins to fray around an object, the materials come into focus on the basis of memory. Or anything else. It is not important. What is important is the movement between things and ideas. A constant to-and-fro between the ideas that are related to forms and the forms that suggest ideas.” [Mansilla \(2000\), 98](#).

“It is not important”. It does not matter. The content does not matter, neither architecture’s connotative allusions. What matters is the consistency that architecture reaches in its correlative identification between form and its conceptual support. This position comes from the moment when modernity opted

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<sup>16</sup> This concept can be related with this text: “thinking seeks out phenomena and experiences which describe more than just a sum of parts, paying almost no attention to separate elements which would be affected and changed through subjective vision and comprehensive images anyway. The mayor concern is not the reality as it is but the search for an all-round idea, for a general content, a coherent thought, or an overall concept that ties everything together. It is known as holism or Gestalt theory and has been most forcefully developed during the age of humanism in the philosophical treatises of the morphological idealism.” [Ungers \(1982\), 7](#)

<sup>17</sup> The reader might notice the influence that Rowe receives from Wittkower, as Palladio was the figure that Rowe compared with Le Corbusier, approaching modernity to Italian Mannerism. But above all, Wittkower’s influence is determined by the structural mathematic interpretation that Rowe uses to make that comparison [Rowe \(1976\)](#).

<sup>18</sup> Anthony Vidler links the final form of the architecture with its diagrammatic representation in a paper that mentions Durand’s method and Wittkower’s and other schematic representations [Vidler \(2000\), 1-20](#).

<sup>19</sup> Both traditions are also expressed in the following quote from a text by Alfonso Muñoz Cosme: “Una tendencia disciplinar ha otorgado a la idea el papel de motor del proyecto, siguiendo una corriente que tiene sus raíces en la cultura manierista, en la creación romántica y en la tradición platónica. Así, el proceso de ideación consistiría en la búsqueda de la idea más adecuada. (...)”

Sin embargo, en otros momentos se ha pensado que el proyecto no precisa partir de ideas, sino de un procedimiento normado y científico, que por deducción nos permite llegar desde las premisas de partida a la solución arquitectónica. Esto es lo que ha sucedido en la tradición académica francesa, en determinados sectores del Movimiento Moderno y en algunas tendencias actuales. (...)” [Muñoz \(2008\), 98-100](#).

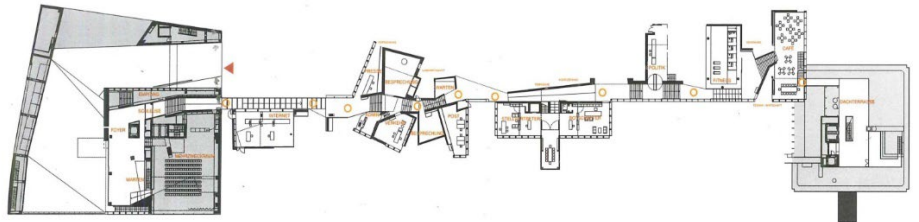
for its conceptual framework over the conflictive ambiguity that is innate in the question of meaning.

### 3. CONCLUSION

The end of the previous epigraph shows the same fracture, the same forgetfulness of the semantic condition of architecture that we find in the Embassy in its most extreme consequences. Where the solid/void abstract coherence, carried to its most logical consequences, has led to the inversion between interior/exterior, and therefore to the nudity of this building's intimacy. This means that the same idea which was the basis of the building has been carried out to the extreme of dissolving it. Thus, it leads this architecture to the dissociation between its supportive frame and its signification, between concept and its meaning.

To the extent that the promenade, the script which connects all the different sequences,<sup>20</sup> is at the same time culpable for the subversion of traditional architectural relationships. The promenade, being responsible for the plot, is also the element which un-structures architecture's own principles and rips out the inner unity of the original pure prism. [Figure 26](#) This operation makes the Renaissance's indissoluble interconnection between formal structure and its meaning disappear. In essence, it breaks the connection between denotative structure and its connotation. As the Embassy has already shown, being designed from its maximum conceptual coherence, its formal identity leads it to the representation of its own semantic disintegration. Therefore, this building's identity coexists with the loss of its nuclear integrity, while its consistency connotes the most inconsistent meaning.

**Figure 26**



**Figure 26** The Promenade Unfolded  
Source OMA

Thus, Koolhaas reaches this difficult synthesis by which architecture seeks its legitimacy through the risky game of its own slippery instability. In essence, he finds the identity through the sublime exacerbation of the most terrifying beauty. [Figure 27](#)

“Koolhaas takes his own radicality and cold search for the “sublime” quite far in an eschewal of intellectual comfort and a celebration of the “terrifying beauty” of the twentieth Century.” [Chaslin \(1999\), 15](#)

<sup>20</sup> There are plenty analyses that understand Koolhaas' work from a cinematic perspective. They are based on his journalism studies and his work as a screenwriter before he started architectural studies. Among these analyses we could find Moneo's interpretation of Villa Dall'Ava in Paris [Moneo \(2004\)](#).

In fact, Koolhaas found a similar terrifying expression in the context of the Embassy. Unlike other locations,<sup>21</sup> his sympathetic comments about this context prove Koolhaas' interest in a place that witnessed one of the most terrible manifestations of 20<sup>th</sup> century horror: the Second World War and its extension into the Cold War, particularly manifested in the Berlin Wall.

“The wall suggested that architecture’s beauty was directly proportional to its horror.” [Koolhaas \(1995\), 226](#)

**Figure 27**



**Figure 27** Interior of the Public Courtyard

**Source** Author

Thus, it could be concluded that Koolhaas translates his understanding of the context of the Embassy through an immediate reflection of its environment’s connotation, particularly of his ideas about the Berlin Wall. In fact, this relationship between the Embassy and its context would not be a misguided conclusion. Because, as proven, the embassy building has lost its interiority from its own basis since it has been conceived from the outside, from external operations that have been performed upon its conceptual volume and model.

In this way, being designed from the exterior, the Embassy building shows an uncritical assumption of the connotations of its closed context. Indeed, it is clear that some described episodes are derived from the nods that the building makes to the context: the glass floor of the promenade, the holes, some views, etc. Nevertheless, it seems that these individual episodes are also forcing some connotative expression out of the naked conceptual abstraction by which this building has been conceived.

[Figure 28](#) This somehow demonstrates the path of this analysis. Because, beyond

<sup>21</sup> “On the other hand, if you are working in Europe, for instance in Berlin, context is everything. And of course, I deeply engage with it and profoundly feel thinking about every issue of the context. But context is of course also political, is not only the physics.” Words by Koolhaas on the video: [Heidingsfelder & Tesch \(2009\)](#). Also see: “The Terrifying Beauty of the Twentieth Century”, in [Koolhaas \(1995\), 204-209](#).



the subversive character of some elements, the most naked expression of this building and its starkest connotation come from the extreme process of the rigorous conceptual operations of its design.

**Figure 28**



**Figure 28** View Through the Public Courtyard

**Source** <http://duitsland.nlambassade.org/organization/de-ambassade/het-ambassadegebouw>

This is a fact that, in turn, could also have its origins in the context, since this is an environment which has, again and again, witnessed how the most inhuman destruction can originate from the most supreme ideals and rational values. Thus, in the same way that the greatest absurdities of the 20th century had their origin in the maximum consistent rationality, this building's inconsistent meaning could also have its source in modern systematic operations that have led its design process to its conceptual nudity.

This leads us to wonder about the voluntary intentions that lie behind this building's semantic connotation.<sup>22</sup> Is this building's subversive meaning simply triggered by some perverted elements which are related to the context and also come from Koolhaas' insurgent intentions? Or rather, does the whole building involuntarily show its radical inconsistency from its own conceptual conception? A conception which, in turn, is apparently based on a rigorously consistent procedure.

In fact, these provocative episodes coexist within the conceptual-structural unity that Koolhaas refers to when he uses the order provided by the air

<sup>22</sup> The critique by Dovey and Dickson also ends up with a question about the voluntary nature of some of the connotations that can be found in the work by Koolhaas: "Is this new spatial hierarchy an accidental by-product of Koolhaas' obsession with the elevator? Or is it a deliberate tactic of bringing authority into the light rather than resisting it (...)" [Dovey & Dickson \(2002\)](#), 13

conditioning system to describe the building. This reveals a contradiction with his own statements about inconsistency and makes us wonder how such conceptual stability can be found in a work by an architect who champions such subversive values. How can Koolhaas describe the consistent framework of the building while he aims at its illicit subversion? How can a maximum coherence be found in a work by an architect who defends the worst inconsistency of his own work?

Moreover, all these facts raise the question: would this building be nothing without its conceptual consistency and is that the reason why Koolhaas needs this indispensable sustainability? Does it represent an unavoidable 'constructive' framework within the pretended 'deconstructive' meaning? Or rather, is the coherent consistency of this project an involuntary humanist heritage, the last moral fortress that has yet to be destroyed? <sup>23</sup>

In essence, all these conjectures come to question the indiscriminate assumption of diagrammatic conceptual design as a projecting method, since this methodology may be more involuntary than we might think as it has its sources in the modernity that we still belong to.

Hence, this is the reason why this paper insists on the fact that these methodological conceptual operations have led architecture to the oblivion of its semantic condition. The same semantic oblivion which forced postmodernism to call for an iconographical recovery.

But postmodernism was rarely able to overcome its 'decorated shed', which was a mere iconographic 'layer', overlapping the modern structure that it was also detached from. A future paper will focus on the iconographic condensation of some projects by Koolhaas which represent an attempt to overcome these irreconcilable dissociations.

## **CONFLICT OF INTERESTS**

None.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

None.

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<sup>23</sup> Derrida describes architecture as the last fortress of metaphysics: "For Derrida these tangible factors conspire to render 'architecture as the last fortress of metaphysics'." Coyne (2011), 60. The factors, that this quote refers to, are related with the concept of dwelling, nostalgia of origin, human service, harmony, and beauty. These statements by Derrida have a direct relation with Koolhaas' attempt to deny any trace of precedent morality in architecture.

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